

wide highway system, including three movable bridges in Calcasieu Parish, required extensive debris removal and repairs to make them safe for traffic. The I-10 bridge over Lake Charles, the main east-west traffic artery through southwest Louisiana and across the southern U.S. was closed following the storm for structural inspection after a barge ran into a supporting structure. An early estimate of parish-wide highway damage is \$20 million.

Cameron Parish, our sister parish to the south was totally devastated. Although there was no loss of life, Cameron suffered the loss of a way of life. Approximately 90 percent of the homes in Cameron, the Parish seat were destroyed. Other communities suffered similar or worse fates. The major industries—oil, agriculture, seafood and tourism—were destroyed. It will take years for the residents to recover. And Southwest Louisiana will never be fully recovered until Cameron is rebuilt and back “in business” again.

Cameron Parish contains four wildlife refuges, all of which sustained significant damage. The Sabine National Wildlife Refuge of 125,000 acres was officially closed after Hurricane Rita. Facilities were destroyed and the landscape was littered with debris from damaged structures, vehicles, dead animals and hazardous chemical containers. The refuge cannot reopen until the hazardous debris is removed and there is no safety risk to the public. In 2004 the economic effect of the refuge and its visitation was \$9 million, supporting 108 jobs and \$1 million in tax revenue. This is an average return of \$10.18 for every federal dollar spent operating the refuge. Annually 300,000 people tour the Creole Nature Trail, which is designated an All-American Road. Nature trail brochures are being pulled out of circulation by bureau officials.

The Southwest Louisiana community immediately began cleaning up and repairing damages in order to begin recovery from this storm. Temporary “blue” roofs were installed on 17,104 houses and apartments. An estimated 5.73 million cubic yards of storm debris was collected, enough to cover a football field with a pile more than one half-mile high.

In addition to residents who were displaced from their homes due to damage, approximately 10,000 evacuees from other places are now residing in Calcasieu Parish. Hotel vacancy is essentially zero and there is a shortage of affordable housing for residents. Because of this housing shortage, many residents have not been able to return to the Parish. Many businesses are still unable to operate for normal business hours because of a shortage of workers. Although many minimum wage jobs are advertised and unfilled for long periods of time, unemployment in the Parish has more than tripled from 5.3 percent in 2004 to 16.2 percent in November 2005, an increase of 10.9 percent due to a number of complex reasons.

We understand the scale of the storm in Hurricane Katrina. And we understand that Southeast Texas was affected by the Hurricane Rita, but please do not penalize us for being aggressive in our efforts to help ourselves recover. It has been said by the FEMA Long Term Community Recovery Team that Southwest Louisiana is leading the state in the recovery effort. But true recovery requires more than just debris removal and new roofs. Because of the devastation caused by Hurricane Rita, we need to retool and rebuild the economy of Southwest Louisiana. We cannot depend on the existing businesses and industry to rebuild the economy of our area. We must be creative and aggressive in our efforts to both diversify and expand our economy if we are to accomplish the long

term recovery goals FEMA and others have set for our area.

Hurricanes Rita and Katrina have impacted 30-40 percent of the economy of our state. It will take years to truly recover from this disaster in terms of real economic recovery. Please help us remind your colleagues that no state in the history of our great nation has ever suffered the extent of economic and social disruption that Louisiana has as a result of these two storms.

Some would say that it is this “can do” attitude that has prevented us in Southwest Louisiana from getting national media attention. We don’t want media attention, but we do need your attention. Please assist us in getting our “fair share” of federal funding for our recovery effort. And please consider extending the GO Zone Legislation for parishes hardest hit by these storms. We need at least an additional two years to take advantage of the economic recovery offered by this bill. And when it comes to the allocation of Community Development Block Grant monies to the individual states, please include an allocation for Hurricane Rita parishes/counties as well.

Thank you again for all you have done in the recent months to focus attention on the recovery of Southwest Louisiana. If you need additional information or we can assist you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely yours,

RANDY ROACH,
Mayor, City of Lake Charles

WILLIE MOUNT,
Louisiana State Senator

GERALD THEUNISSEN,
Louisiana State Senator

CHUCK KLECKLEY,
Louisiana House of Representatives

ELCIE GULLORY,
Louisiana House of Representatives

RONNIE JOHNS,
Louisiana House of Representatives

DAN MORRISH,
Louisiana House of Representatives

BRETT GEYEMAN,
Louisiana House of Representatives.

[From American Press Editorial, Mar. 10, 2006.]

HEY, CONGRESS, HOW ABOUT US?

On Wednesday, President Bush once again toured New Orleans’ areas damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

The President’s visit, his 10th, comes on the heels of another visit by a large congressional delegation to New Orleans and parts of Mississippi hit by Hurricane Katrina.

There were about 100 people in the delegation, including Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert and Minority Leader, Nancy Pelosi.

The trip was organized by Hastert’s office and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Meanwhile, residents of Calcasieu, Cameron, and Vermilion parishes who are picking up the pieces from the devastating Hurricane Rita wonder if they are being forgotten or if anybody in Washington, D.C., cares.

We understand that the areas in New Orleans and the Mississippi Coast are hurting, but so are Southwest Louisiana and Southeast Texas.

It’s an insult to Southwest Louisiana residents that more than five months after Hurricane Rita struck here they are still waiting

for members of Congress to come and see the devastation Rita wrought.

Members of Congress need to talk to Cameron Parish residents who have seen their entire way of life blown away by Rita.

Why do Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco and Texas Gov. Rick Perry have to go to Washington to beg Congress to send more funds for Hurricane Rita relief?

All of this is a stark reminder about how Congress is out-of-touch with what needs to be done to help Southwest Louisiana and Southeast Texas get back on track.

Louisiana Seventh District U.S. Rep. Charles Boustany Jr. is aware of the problem with Rita amnesia in Washington. He sent a letter to Hastert and Pelosi when he learned about the congressional visit to New Orleans and Mississippi, urging them to include Southwest, Louisiana in their fact-finding tour.

Hastert responded in a March 1 letter that he considered including a tour of Southwest Louisiana in their recent visit, but it was not possible.

“Unfortunately, logistics and time constraints made it impractical to tour the parts of Louisiana impacted by Hurricane Rita during this trip,” Hastert wrote.

He added that he wants to arrange a “future visit” so he can “personally come down to Southwest Louisiana.”

Time’s a-wastin’, Mr. Speaker.

A number of congressional delegations have visited Louisiana and Mississippi in months past. Why didn’t any come to this part of the state? Why does Boustany have to beg members of Congress to come here? Why haven’t U.S. Sens. Mary Landrieu and David Vitter come here with a delegation of their Capitol Hill colleagues in tow to see Southwest Louisiana?

Landrieu of New Orleans and Vitter of Metairie have been on the forefront in getting assistance for Katrina-ravaged areas.

They represent this part of the state, too.

Vitter recently asked Don Powell, the federal recovery and rebuilding coordinator, to tour storm-damaged areas in Southwest Louisiana.

It’s the members of Congress, not Powell, who will approve the relief funds this area so desperately needs.

Landrieu and Vitter need to help bring a large congressional delegation here to Southwest Louisiana. The sooner the better.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I fully support the funding for our troops in this Emergency Supplemental; the men and women serving our country in Iraq and Afghanistan must have equipment to effectively fight insurgents, and the harsh environment has taken its toll on everything from helicopters to tanks to armored vehicles.

I am concerned however that we are not addressing the impact of lost equipment and vehicles when our National Guard and Reserve units are forced to leave their equipment in Iraq.

Some reports state that Guard and Reserve units in the U.S. are only equipped at 30 percent of pre-war levels. The FY06 Defense Appropriations bill included \$1 billion for reequipping units here at home, but the Guard needs \$20 billion to address the shortage.

Money is tight in times of war, but national security is hollow if we leave our homeland unprotected to fight wars overseas. If we are going to increase the federal debt limit yet again—by nearly \$800 billion this time—and extend tax cuts, we should also equip the men and women who protect the homeland from terrorist attacks and natural disasters.

This is extremely important for constituents in the district I represent. In 2001, Tropical